DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 592 CE 064 613

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TITLE Primary and Secondary Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs.
INSTITUTION Pelavin Associates, Inc., Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Apr 92
NOTE 11p.; For related documents, see ED 349 439-441, ED 352 499, and CE 064 612-614.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Adult Programs; Curriculum; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Quality; *Evaluation Criteria; Literacy Education; Outcomes of Education; Program Content; Program Design; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; School Holding Power; Staff Development; Student Development; Student Recruitment

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a list of quality indicators for adult education programs. The list was developed after consideration of background materials and input from four focus groups. The list is divided into two main areas: student outcomes and program process and content. Within each area, the primary indicators (those identified by at least three of the four focus groups) are presented by topic area, along with examples of measures for each indicator. The area of student outcomes includes two topic areas: educational gains and student personal-social development. The area of program process and content includes six topic areas: program planning; curriculum and instruction; staff development and characteristics; support services; recruitment; and retention. A list of secondary indicators, which are indicators identified by one or two focus groups, follows. For student outcomes, topic areas are as follows: educational gains, student personal-social development, employment-related gains, family literacy, and "other." Topics in the area of program process and content are: program planning, curriculum and instruction, staff development and characteristics, and organizational support. (YLB)

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ED 361 592

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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April 1992

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PRIMARY AND SECONDARY INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The following list of quality indicators was developed after consideration of the background materials developed for the project and input from the four focus groups. The background materials provided the overall framework and a wide, preliminary list of potential indicators. The focus groups served as a means of verifying the preliminary indicators and prioritizing them in order of importance. To create the list of primary indicators we considered indicators and topic areas identified by at least three of the focus groups. In some cases it was necessary to synthesize several of the groups' recommendations into a single topic area or indicator, for example by combining indicators under a slightly different topic area than used by a group. The primary indicators are defined as the most essential elements of program quality that should be used to assess all adult education programs.

The National Literacy Act requires that quality indicators include educational gains, recruitment and retention. All groups discussed these topics and they are included on the list due to the legislative mandate.

The list is divided into two areas: student outcomes; and program process and content. Within each area, the primary indicators are presented by topic area, along with examples of measures for each indicator. A list of secondary indicators, which are indicators identified by one or two groups, follows the primary list.

PRIMARY INDICATORS

STUDENT OUTCOMES

The focus groups members agreed that students in quality adult education programs should not only achieve gains in basic literacy, but demonstrate personal and social development. Indicators were developed in both of these areas. Students should attain basic skill competencies, learn skills that are applicable in a functional context and advance to higher levels of learning. Quality programs should also raise self-esteem and foster improvements in attitudes and behaviors related to learning. Quality programs also help their students achieve their goals for attending the program. The indicators developed by the focus groups reflect these concerns, which are also embodied in the definition of literacy in the National Literacy Act.

Educational Gains

Indicator 1: Attainment of basic literacy skills and competencies.

Participation in adult education programs results in attainment of linguistic, communication and problem solving competencies, demonstrated by improvement in participants' abilities to understand, speak, read and write English and perform basic computations.

Sample Measures

- Standardized test score gains (e.g., TABE, ABLE).
- Attainment of GED or high school diploma.
- Competency-based test score gains (e.g., CASAS).
- Alternative assessment methods (e.g., portfolio assessment, teacher reports of gains/improvements in communication competencies).

Indicator 2: Attainment of life skills applied in a functional context.

Participation in adult education programs results in development of literacy skills students can use outside the classroom, (e.g., the workplace, the family, the civic community) to improve their lives.

Sample Measures

- Test score gains on program- or state-developed tests that measure life skills.
- Test score gains on standardized tests that measure life skills, (e.g., CASAS).
- Student report of attainment or improvement in specific life skills (such as completing job applications, reading bus schedules).

Indicator 3: Advancement or continuation of education to a higher level.

Programs promote progression to higher level of learning, both within and beyond the adult education program.

Sample Measures

- Rate of student advancement to a higher level of skill or competency in the adult education program.
- Percent of students entering into other education or training programs.

Student Personal-Social Development

Indicator 1: Attainment of personal goals.

Programs enable students to achieve their personal goals for attending the program. The program has a system for assisting students to set realistic, achievable goals for participation.

Sample Measure

- Student reports of attainment of main goals established at intake, and measured within a limited time after program completion.

Indicator 2: Improvement in attitudes and behavior.

Participation in the education program leads to changes in everyday behavior and attitudes that reflect better life skills or improvements in literacy. Behavioral changes may be observed within or outside the classroom. Improved attitudes include self esteem.

Sample Measures

- Student report or teacher rating of whether students showed improvement in demeanor or attitudes in class such as: being better prepared, more attentive, and/or participating more.

- Gain in self-esteem, measured by rating scale administered to students.

- Student report of behaviors such as: greater use of libraries, greater interest in children's education, or more assertiveness on the job or in social interaction.

PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT

An important task of the focus groups was to identify the program components or inputs that were central to quality adult education. The consensus of all groups was that a good program was well planned, had quality instruction and instructors, promoted staff development and provided for a wide range of participant needs. Indicators were developed in each of these categories. In addition, the groups agreed that recruitment and retention were part of program operations and were included here as process indicators.

Program Planning

Indicator 1: Program has a written mission statement that includes program goals and guides services offered.

The program has a mission statement that serves as a written blueprint on program goals, services and approaches.

Sample Measures

- Presence or absence of a mission statement.

- The statement specifies realistic goals regarding: purpose of the program, participants to be served, instructional approach and other program components.

Indicator 2: Planning is an on-going process that considers community demographics, needs, resources and economic and technological trends.

Planning is responsive to the needs of learners and the community, with mechanisms for revising plans on a regular basis. The planning process includes input from a variety of sources such as staff, students and community-level data.

Sample Measures

- Frequency with which plans are reviewed or revised.
- Openness of the program to community input through mechanisms such as: advisory board, staff meetings, student questionnaires and public hearings (checklist); and frequency with which these sources are consulted.
- The program plan matches community needs regarding location of classes, skills taught, type of program services offered (e.g., sufficient ESL instruction).

Curriculum and Instruction

Indicator 1: Curriculum and instruction is non-biased, multi-cultural and geared to different levels of student needs.

The curriculum meets the needs of students with diverse abilities and who come from different cultural backgrounds.

Sample Measures

- Checklist of curriculum that rates bias in language, cultural relevance of examples and exercises, accommodations to different learning styles and incoming skill levels of learners. Ratings could be done by instructors, peer review, students or state.
- Content analysis of instructional topics.

Indicator 2: Instruction includes various methods and strategies.

Instructors use varied teaching approaches to accommodate the diverse needs, skills and objectives of students.

Sample Measures

- Checklist of types of teaching strategies (e.g., small groups, individual, computer assisted) used.
- Time or frequency with which strategies are used, measured through observation or self-report.

Indicator 3: Feedback from students and staff informs instruction.

Feedback from staff and students is used to ensure that instruction is responsive to student needs.

Sample Measures

- Use of student assessment information to inform the instructional process.
- Frequency with which feedback is obtained.
- Topic areas in which feedback is sought and given.

Staff Development and Characteristics

Indicator 1: Program staff has appropriate qualifications and experience.

Instructors have the skills and experience needed to provide quality instruction to students.

Sample Measures

- Instructional staff have degrees, coursework or credentials appropriate for instructing adults.
- Staff experience teaching or working in adult education.

Indicator 2: Program has a staff development component that provides orientation to the philosophy and goals of the program, is on-going, and is based on input from staff and students.

Staff is knowledgeable about the program and has opportunities for professional development. Input from staff and students in staff development is used to keep the program responsive to student needs.

Sample Measures

- Presence or absence of preservice and/or inservice staff development opportunities that include a program overview, philosophy and goals of the program and topics appropriate to adult learning.
- Average hours of preservice and inservice staff development training received by staff.
- Amount of time or compensation provided to staff to participate in staff development activities.

Support Services

Indicator: Program ensures that requisite support services are made available to students directly or through other educational and service agencies.

Adult education programs ensure that the lack of support services is not a barrier to student learning and achievement of literacy-related goals.

Sample Measures

- Number and type of support services provided.
- Percent of students obtaining specific needed services through the program.

Recruitment

Indicator 1: Recruitment is targeted to the population in need of literacy services.

Programs have an appropriate process for recruiting the population in need.

Sample Measures

- Knowledge of descriptive data from an outside source on characteristics of the population in the target area related to literacy needs (e.g., high school dropout statistics, workforce needs, immigration data)
- Listing of specific population targeted for recruitment, including characteristics and numbers targeted.
- Checklist of recruitment methods planned for each population.

Indicator 2: Program is successful in recruiting target population.

The program recruits and enrolls the population in need of literacy services in the community.

Sample Measures

- Percentage of target population enrolled.
- Percent of students enrolled with specific characteristics compared to the population with these characteristics in need of services in the area.

Retention

Indicator 1: The program has a process for achieving retention.

The program has appropriate processes for improving retention.

Sample Measures

- Types of follow-up procedures used to contact students.
- Time after absence students are contacted.

  Frequency of follow-up contact efforts.

Indicator 2: Students remain in the program long enough to achieve their goals.

Retention is measured in light of student goals by time in program. Retention benchmarks are established that account for the type of program and goal achievement expected for a given number of hours in the program.

Sample Measure

- Hours in program by type of program and student goal.

SECONDARY INDICATORS OF QUALITY

The following indicators were identified by one or two focus groups. Since there was lack of consensus on the centrality of these indicators in defining program quality, they are not included as primary indicators. The list is organized by topic area.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Educational Gains

- Grade level achieved.

Student Personal and Social Development

- Improved ability to work cooperatively in groups.
- Development of leadership qualities.
- Improved citizenship.

Employment-Related Gains

- Attainment of skills that enhance employability.
- Obtainment of, or improvement in, employment.
- Improved work skills.

Family Literacy

- Increased family involvement in the education process.
- Improved family attitudes about literacy.

Other

- Satisfaction with the program.

PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT

Program Planning

- Existence of a written plan.
- Evaluation informs the planning process.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Instruction is integrated with other program components so that there is a flow from diagnosis, assessment, instruction and feedback.
- Instruction reflects current research and practice.

Staff Development and Characteristics

- Staff development is based on sound research on teaching adults.
- Staff development addresses all job descriptions.
- Staff development is culturally diverse.
- Staff development is based on program goals.

Organizational Support for the Program

Two groups identified this new topic area.

- Program budget is sufficient to provide quality services.
- Program is an integral part of the parent organization.
- Program resources (staff, facilities, equipment) are sufficient to operate a quality program.